

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L PARIS 33184

E. O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, FR, IN, MILI

SUBJECT: FRENCH PRIME MINISTER TO VISIT INDIA IN
JANUARY

REF: NEW DELHI 16265

1. MICHEL DE BONNECORSE, ASSISTANT DIPLOMATIC ADVISER TO PRIME MINISTER CHIRAC, HAS JUST RETURNED FROM WEEK'S STAY IN INDIA. HE WAS THERE TO PREPARE PRIME MINISTER'S OFFICIAL VISIT WHICH WILL TAKE PLACE DURING WEEK OF JANUARY 20. DE BONNECORSE TOLD US THAT DATE OF VISIT WAS AGREED UPON LAST AUGUST. CHIRAC IS LESS ENTHUSIASTIC ABOUT THE VISIT NOW THAN HE WAS LAST SUMMER BECAUSE OF HIS CONCERN OVER ADVERSE INTERNAL FRENCH POLITICAL REPERCUSSIONS. ACCORDING TO DE BONNECORSE, THE GOF FEELS THAT MRS. GANDHI'S ADVANCE TOWARD DICTATORSHIP IS NOW IRREVERSIBLE, AND CHIRAC IS UNHAPPY WITH THE IDEA OF APPEARING TO CONDONE THIS DEVELOPMENT THROUGH HIS OFFICIAL VISIT.

2. DE BONNECORSE SAID HE MET A GOOD SAMPLING OF
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INDIAN INTELLECTUALS DURING HIS VISIT, AND WAS IM-

PRESSED BY THE OVERWHELMINGLY NEGATIVE COMMENTS ABOUT MRS. GANDHI. HE QUOTED BOMBAY BUSINESSMEN AS TELLING HIM THAT THEY WERE HAPPY WITH THEIR PRIME MINISTER'S INITIAL ACTIONS IN DECLARING A STATE OF EMERGENCY, BUT ARE NOW ON THE VERGE OF WITHDRAWING THEIR SUPPORT. (COMMENT: WE ARE OBVIOUSLY NOT IN A POSITION TO EVALUATE THIS ANALYSIS, BUT DE BONNECORSE'S OBSERVATIONS WILL CLEARLY CARRY WEIGHT WITH TOP LEVELS OF GOF.)

3. THE VISIT ITSELF IS NOT LIKELY TO RESULT IN ANY IMPORTANT NEW AGREEMENTS, DE BONNECORSE SAID. THE GOF HOPES TO STRENGTHEN TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE TIES IN THE ELECTRONICS FIELD SO AS TO ENHANCE EXPORT OPPORTUNITIES.

4. ON THE QUESTION OF A NEW FIGHTER AIRCRAFT FOR THE INDIAN AIR FORCE, (REFTEL), DE BONNECORSE SAID IT WAS NOT EXPECTED THAT A DECISION WILL HAVE BEEN MADE BEFORE CHIRAC'S VISIT. IN FACT, CHIRAC HOPES TO BE ABLE TO BOOST SALES PROSPECTS FOR THE MIRAGE F-1 DURING HIS VISIT. ON THE BASIS OF AVAILABLE INFORMATION, THE MIG-23 APPEARS TO BE THE FRONTRUNNER, DE BONNECORSE SAID. HE SAID THIS IS TRUE FOR BOTH POLITICAL AND FINANCIAL REASONS. THE GOF IS NOW DEBATING TWO TACTICAL OPTIONS DE BONNECORSE INDICATED-- PLACE FULL WEIGHT BEHIND THE MIRAGE, OR SWITCH TO THE JAGUAR IN THE HOPE THAT COMBINED BRITISH AND FRENCH INFLUENCE WILL PREVAIL. THERE IS A BODY OF OPINION IN THE GOF WHICH ARGUES THAT THE "BRITISH LOBBY" IN INDIA IS INFLUENTIAL, AND THAT THE ONLY CHANCE FOR DEFEATING THE MIG LIES IN A JOINT ANGLO-FRENCH EFFORT. DE BONNECORSE SAID THAT INDIAN AIR FORCE /ILOTS ARE CURRENTLY IN FRANCE TEST FLYING THE MIRAGE. RUSH

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